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Verses

by Mary Moffat Cunningham

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VERSES

BY

MARY MOFFAT CUNNINGHAM

BONNELL, SILVER & CO.

NEW YORK

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NEW YORK

VERSES

TO MY MOTHER

If haply vagrant words of mine
May echo some fine thought of thine
I shall be glad;
But if a wayward mood of mine
Should wound that tender heart of thine
I must be sad.
How patient with all faults of mine,
How loyal is that soul of thine!
Without a fear
I offer thee this verse of mine;
With that sweet mother-smile of thine
Accept it, dear!

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VERSES

VENICE

Across the vale of past delight I gaze
With eyes that strain to pierce the baffling haze
That now reveals, then hides thy form from me,
Thou fair enchantress of the eastern sea!
A myriad of darting, dancing beams
Converge in one bright spot that glows and gleams;
San Giorgio at sunset! Can it be
The longed for vision is accorded me?
See where his tall red tower mounts on high!
Watch the rich colors grow and multiply!
Pale rose, deep orange, fervid gold, and green—
Where else are hues so varied ever seen?
Frail palaces appear to swim in air,
And phantom islands shine suspended there.
Trace in the distance pale Salute's dome
That rises like a bubble born of foam!
Around it hover fitful mists that float,
And through the light there drifts one drowsy boat

With giant umber sails, like folded wings,
Aweary with the strife the long day brings.
A faint salt scent comes from the far lagoon,
Precursor of the breeze to follow soon.
A hundred bells speed on departing light!
A hundred bells peal welcome to the night!
How quickly then the clang and clamor cease,
And all is silence, all is rest and peace!
The moon behind a veil attempts to hide
Her loveliness from sight, as some shy bride.
The blue-black water laps against a pier;
With careless grace the dextrous boatmen steer.
A soft, delicious languor everywhere,
A tumult of swift words that cleave the air,
A happy woman's laughter from afar,
A lantern flashing like a mimic star.
Stali! From out the darkness shrill and clear
Rings forth the warning of a gondolier.
A tenor voice, a light guitar's sweet strain,
The echo of that laughter once again!
A velvet hand by someone caught and kept,
Fond looks of love no night can intercept;

The witchery of Spring when one is young,
The poetry of motion, all unsung.
Glide on, true lovers! Quickly youth is spent!
Sail on, to gain the haven of content!
So many souls who fail that port to win!
Yours be the bliss of those who enter in!

MEMORY

It never seems that you are strange to me.
Where was it that we met before?
My thoughts, long fettered, struggle to be free;
In vain they beat against the door
Of memory, like fingers weak and white
That strive to draw a bolt of might.

How subtle is this sense of memory,
And who can understand the power
Which hides itself deep as conspiracy,
Or with the perfume of a flower
Comes flashing for an instant into light,
Then disappears in blackest night?

Sometimes a strain of music sweet and wild,
Which charms me into ecstasy,
Brings recollections of a little child
Who in a garden played with me.
Were you my chosen comrade long ago?
Were you that child I used to know?

Sometimes the quiet touch of your dear hand
Has led me through a gate of dreams
Into a far, but still remembered land.
So fair and beautiful, it seems,
Indeed, to mortal, earth-accustomed eyes,
The entrance way to Paradise.

Sometimes I hear a rustle in the trees,
Where Ariel so sweetly sings;
Then softly comes a whisper with the breeze,
Faint as the whir of spirit wings.
I listen then with rapture and surprise
Because your voice I recognize.

Ah, no, you surely are not strange to me.
Something within me seems to say
We two have met before, on land or sea,
Long ages since, or yesterday
Perchance. What matters date, or name, or
place?
Somewhere I met you face to face!

THE WATER-CHILD

AWEARY of the stifling inland towns,
I crave more air, more space, more liberty;
I long to walk the wind-swept, salt-brushed downs,
To gaze with rapture on the boundless sea;
I yearn to snatch my fill of it,
To catch the splendid thrill of it,
To sip the fragrant tang of it,
To hear the constant clang of it,
To revel in the health of it,
The satisfying wealth of it,
The fierce Titanic might of it,
The fury and the fight of it!

Like an imprisoned gull I chafe and sigh,
And beat against my cage incessantly,
While like the loosened bird my thoughts still fly
On wings of fancy to the sounding sea;
To pulsate with the mood of it,
To feel the plenitude of it,
The giant onward sweep of it,

The stealthy backward creep of it,
The ghostly, haunting cry of it,
The everlasting why of it,
The overwhelming roar of it,
The whisperings on the shore of it!

Of all delights that lavish Nature brings,
  I count the first her ocean symphony;
Of all the wistful melodies she sings
  None move me like the music of the sea!
The rhythmic rise and fall of it,
The luring siren call of it,
The deep, heartrending moan of it,
The penetrating tone of it,
The tireless, beating surge of it,
The melancholy dirge of it,
The swinging, ringing bell of it,
The sailors' tolling knell of it!

Deep source from which the painters draw such
    themes
  As mock their skill and ingenuity;
What artist ever caught the golden gleams
  That dance and sparkle o'er the summer
    sea?

Not one can find the green of it,
Or seize the silver sheen of it,
Or show the sapphire blue of it,
The rainbow changing hue of it,
The sudden, startling dash of it,
The unexpected flash of it,
The misty, mystic haze of it,
The countless subtle ways of it!

ANTICIPATION

(Irish Coast)

I

On the road to meet my lad
'Tis the voice o' me that's glad,
And the woman's heart within me laughs and sings.
Sure I need no jaunting car,
For ten miles is never far
When sweet love is after lending me his wings!

II

'Twas the carrier brought word,
And he told me how he heard
That the ship had just been sighted down the bay.
'Deed I'll see my lover soon,
With good luck this afternoon,
Oh my feet they do be dancing all the way!

III

'Tis to plaze him I am drest
In my finest Sunday best,
With a little sprig o' shamrock in my hair;
My white kerchief is brand new,
And my skirt is clean and blue,
And my shoes I do be holding them with care.

IV

Oh the soul o' me is gay!
Was there ever such a day?
Why, the sun can't keep from smiling in his sky!
All the flowers nod to me,
And the birds chirp cheerily,
And the madcap brook shouts loud as I pass by!

V

'Tis myself will reach the pier
Long before the boat draws near,
And belike I'll take my Larry by surprise.
Och, the waving o' his hand
When he sees me where I'll stand!
Och, the look that will be flashing from his eyes!

BEREAVEMENT

I

What is this ye're telling me?
That my Larry's drowned at sea,
That he met a hero's death—a gallant end.
He was always brave and kind—
He was not the one to mind
His own life, if he could only save a friend.

II

Of what use does glory be?
'Tis his face I long to see,
And I want to kiss his lips just once again!
Sure I need no saint above,
But my lad alive—to love—
God forgive me! I am mad with grief and pain!

III

Do ye mind the curlew's cry,
And the mournful wind's deep sigh,
And the waves that sob as if their hearts would break?

'Tis because they heard him moan
When he sank out there alone,
While the night lit stars as candles for his wake.

IV

Woe is me that was not there!
And he thought I did not care—
I that loved him so and hoped to be his bride!
Troth I'll never be a wife,
Yet a widdy all my life,
For my joy has ebbed this day just like the tide!

V

A glad heart loves company,
'Tis alone that I would be,
And I want to go back home where all is wild,
To the tears of mist and fog,
To the breath of friendly bog,
To the comfort that the hills will give their child!

MOODS

I

Sombre grief is as old as the world and the
woe
That was felt by poor mortals long eons ago;
A mere fragment forlorn
Of a page blurred and torn,
That was read by another before we were born.

Like a link in a chain it still binds hard and
fast
To the sorrows of those who have lived in the
past;
A loose strand strung with tears,
Baffled hopes, dismal fears,
But a line that has lengthened and strength-
ened with years.

Like some ponderous weight it would drag us
to earth;
'Tis the obdurate foe of all innocent mirth;
Pallid sister of dread,
How it wails for the dead,
As the night when the light into darkness has
fled!

II

Tender joy has the youth of the faint crescent moon;
'Tis as sweet and as fresh as the first rose of June.
'Tis a bright flashing ray,
Like a sunbeam astray
On its journey through space that has wandered this way.

Those who gather life's manna must ever make haste.
If we mean to grasp joy there is no time to waste;
Yet 'tis harder to seize
Than the light through the trees,
Or a thistle ball blown by the breath of a breeze.

If by chance we obtain it and wish it to stay,
There is only one plain and infallible way:
We must scatter it wide.
It will turn like the tide,
For to those who give joy, it comes back multiplied!

THE CEDAR TREE

I KNOW a gaunt old cedar tree
That grows beside the sounding sea,
  Where waves are ever threatening
  The gnarled, grotesque, unsightly thing
With ill-concealed hostility.

The querulous, impatient tide
That fails to reach the steep hillside
  Has some deep grievance of its own,
  And in a sullen monotone
Rebukes the hapless tree for pride.

Grim elements of strength conspire
To mock and jeer with cruel ire—
  The raging storm with fury blind,
  The pelting rain, the wanton wind,
The rifting frost, the red sun's fire!

It seems indeed a cheerless lot
To fight for life in this grim spot,
  In winter stoned by ice and sleet,
  In summer scorched by cruel heat,
By foes pursued, by friends forgot!

In sheltered fields the great elms grow
Whose grace and beauty all men know:
  The glory of this bleak hill's crest
  Is the stanch tree I love the best,
The cedar with its head bowed low.

To bend and sway is not to break!
Repeated struggles only make
  The soldier stronger to resist.
  Mark the great roots that twine and twist
Around that rock no force can shake!

When marching regiments appear,
The ragged flags are those we cheer;
  Our eyes look lovingly upon
  The thin and tattered gonfalon,
Torn in the wars year after year.

All honor to the cedar tree!
Distorted, marred, yet brave and free,
  It lifts a battered banner high
  And waves the ensign toward the sky,
Then shakes with weird, triumphant glee.

MY BOAT

Before he sails upon the sea,
A fisherman of Brittany
Will kneel to say this simple prayer:
"Keep me, my God, my boat is small,
Thy sea is wide. Thou rulest all.
Oh, keep me ever in thy care!"

A lonely sail is gliding by,
One distant shape I just descry,
A speck of white where cloud meets sea.
It brings to mind the sailor's prayer,
A childlike trust, a Father's care,
And a heart that is blithe and free.

This human life for you and me
Is like the wave-tossed, boundless sea.
The need is great, but weak the call.
My soul is yonder struggling bark,
That journeys on through storm and dark.
"Keep me, my God! My boat is small!"

DANIEL BOONE

A BRAVE man wandered in a wilderness,
  Unbroken forest, trackless, dark and wide,
Where savage beasts, as strong and pitiless
  As hate, lurked in the gloom on either side:
Alert and keen they stood with bated breath,
  And giant hunger still unsatisfied.
One careless move was certain to mean death!

More daring were the fiendish human foes
  Who followed hard upon the white man's
    track,
And any verdant fern-bank might disclose
  A cruel hand uplifted for attack.
With ready rifle, and with watchful eyes,
  He hurried on, nor turned to once look back,
On constant guard against the least surprise.

He never stooped to drink from limpid lake,
  Or placid pool, without first listening
To hear a red man crawling through the brake,
  Or furtive footsteps faintly following.

He looked for arrows glinting in the light,
For painted warriors, crouched low to spring;
Still on he pressed with neither haste nor fright.

Boone loved a life of action, free and bold;
Dangers that make the weakling cringe and quail
Give added zest to heroes of his mould.
Strengthened of God he could not flinch or fail;
He called himself a chosen instrument,
And where he found no path he blazed a trail
That opened half a mighty continent.

He knew the plaintive cry of whippoorwill
Was but a signal in the gathering gloom;
The turkey's call went through him with a thrill—

An old device to lure him to his doom.
Sad voices whispered to the sombre trees
As twilight fell, when listless leaves assume
Strange shapes, and tremble in the quickened breeze.

At last he reached a fair and fertile land
Of grass and groves and glades and singing streams,
Where Spring had lately waved a magic wand;
And as he gazed he dreamt prophetic dreams
Of what the future held;—deep mysteries
Shot through with flitting rays of truth, like beams
Of golden light that dance in darkest trees.

What were the visions of this pioneer?
What were his thoughts in those long, lonely days?
Was his strange prescience strong enough and clear
To see Kentucky rising through the haze,
A noble Commonwealth, the nation's pride,
Whose gallant sons and daughters sing her praise
And spread her growing glory far and wide?

JUNE GALE

I LISTEN to the sound of hurtling rain
That beats against the pane;
And to the wind—almost a hurricane—
That shrieks in divers keys,
And imprecates the cowed, defenseless trees.

Discordant voices strive to pierce the sky;
Anon a plaintive cry
As of an outcast soul that cannot die,
Condemned through endless years
To expiate his sin with groans and tears.

I hear the mocking laughter of the sea,
Who pounds with cruel glee
The angry rock, his ancient enemy.
Primordial hate and strife
Decreed to last throughout a planet's life!

The thunder, fiercest demon of the air,
Has left his hidden lair,
And lightning issues forth with vivid glare,
Or fiery, zigzag chain;
Look yonder where it comes! See there again!

Grim things inanimate are wide awake;
I feel the cottage shake,
The casements shiver, and the rafters quake;
While darkness, like a pall,
Descends in sullen silence round us all.

The house-dog whines and crouches at my feet;
I hear the maid repeat
A *Pater noster;* in the chimney seat
Two children wail with fright.
God pity farers on the sea this night!

THE CHILD-LIKE HEART

The sweetest sound we hear on earth
Is the laughter of a child,
That joyous burst of guileless mirth
From a source still undefiled.
Sometimes through vistas grey with years
We may catch its mellow trace—
The merriment that reappears
On a kind old woman's face;
One whose long day is almost spent,
One who knows life's pain and smart,
And yet can smile with glad content—
For she keeps the child-like heart.

PUSSY-WILLOWS

The buds can speak! I bend to hear
Their simple words of kindly cheer.
They tell of birds and grass and flowers,
Of running brooks, of vernal flowers.
What do the pussy-willows say?
Just this: "Sweet Spring is on her way."

Each bud enwraps a mystery
Of life returning, full and free;
Of fear grown old, of hope born new,
A dream of love somewhere come true.
What do the pussy-willows say?
Just this: "Sweet Spring is on her way."

Below the ice the streams still flow,
Within the earth the daisies grow;
Now swallows speed across the sky—
Look out for thrushes by-and-bye!
What do the pussy-willows say?
Just this: "Sweet Spring is on her way."

To hearts that mourn, alone and sad,
The joyous buds cry out "Be glad!
The Spring is not the time to weep;
What you call death is only sleep!"
What do the pussy-willows say?
Just this: "Sweet Spring is on her way."

LITTLE MOTHER

Little mother, sweet and brave,
  Carrying your baby brother;
Gentle sister, pale and grave,
  Always working for another;
    Mending, scrubbing,
    Washing, rubbing,
Waking early, toiling late,
    Patient, cheerful,
    Never tearful,
Uncomplaining of your fate,
    Life's hard burden,
    Without guerdon;
Heaven help you, little mother!

Well you earn a holiday!
  Let *me* watch the baby brother!
I should love to see you play.
  Run, dear, just as any other
    Happy child should
    To the wildwood!
Spend the rare and sunny hours

Of your outing,
Romping, shouting;
From the grass, and trees, and flowers
Gather pleasure
Without measure!
Blessings on you, little mother!

THE FLUTE PLAYER

Do you see the poor man as he stands in the rain?
Do you hear when he plays his old-fashioned refrain?
Do you mark that he frequently pauses to rest,
That he coughs, that he buttons his coat round his chest?
How the mischievous wind lifts his silvery hair?
How his thin fingers tremble? Does any one care?
One, two, three and again!
How it beats in the brain!

Just one hurrying stranger, who tosses a dime,
Cries, "I'm sorry, my friend, but I have not the time.
These long strikes are too common. What! no work to do?
You are sure to be helped if your story is true!"
And he goes on his way, like the Levite of old.
How absurd for a man to play out in the cold!
One, two, three and again!
Why, the fellow's insane!

For, alas! who may know that this man in the rain
Has just left his one child on a sick-bed of pain?
Long the father stood watching her, dry-eyed and mute;
Then he reached for his hat and he picked up his flute,
And he ran in his anguish far down the dark street;
He plays there for love's sake. Hear the waltz, sad and sweet!
One, two, three and again!
There are tears in the strain!

He has chosen a house that looks cheerful and bright;
He can see the dim figures that cross in the light.
There are children who dance to the time of the air
Which he thrums with the courage of helpless despair.

There's a form at the window—a trim servant
maid—
O, my God! She is coming to draw down the
shade.
One, two, three and again!
All his labor in vain!

TO MELANIE

Long years ago, two little girls,
We sat together on one stool;
You chose me for my dark-brown curls,
And I chose you one day in school.

I chose you for your steadfast eyes,
Which gazed in mine so candidly.
The childish mind is strangely wise;
How well I read you, Melanie!

A friendship founded on the rock
Of confidence is sure to last.
We warrant ours to stand the shock
Of future storms, as in the past.

What fun we've had, what happy talks!
What interchange of pleasant thought!
What rides and drives, and woodland walks!
What plans discussed, and counsel sought!

Your love is like a swallow's nest,
From which he takes his fearless flight;
A sheltered spot for peaceful rest,
Where he returns with keen delight.

Although I seldom see your face
(Our roads wind many miles apart),
Still I am sure you keep my place
In some warm corner of your heart.

Propinquity must serve for those
Who feel affection insecure.
Absence and time are deadly foes
Of make-believe. *Our* bond is sure!

Fate made us friends for life, you know.
There's something in affinity!
'Twas not by chance long years ago
That I chose you, and you chose me!

HOME

"WHERE is your home?" a stranger said,
As he bent low to touch the head
Of a bewitching child.
"Poor stupid man, why, don't you see,
Where Mother is, there's home!" cried she;
And charmingly she smiled.

ELIZABETH'S BIRTHDAY

SINCE you are six and I am too,
I wish to ask something of you:
How old are both together?
Ah, how I wonder whether
You can tell me the answer true,
Since you are six and I am too!

PHILOSOPHY

My learned friend, Professor Mars,
Took great delight in watching stars.
Once when he fell and hurt his head,
What do you think this old man said?
"How fortunate I am!" cried he.
"What fools call pain is bliss to me!
For I still see stars!"
Quoth the prostrate Mars.

THE FAIRY BALL

(*For Little People*)

I

Come, my children, draw chairs near,
Those of you who wish to hear
About the famous fairy ball.
Sit in a ring! Make room for all!
I was not there, for, don't you see,
They never thought of asking me.
Was it last night, or long ago?
No questions, please! I do not know.
'Twas told me by the Chickadee
And he abhorred accuracy;
He said such words as "where" and "when"
Are only used by stupid men.
It was a fête the Fairy Queen
Gave for her daughter, just eighteen.
"That much," he said, "is strictly true,"
Then raised his wings and off he flew.
Now, dear children, if you will
Hear the tale, keep very still!

II

The fire-flies hung their lanterns low;
Wee gnomes made preparations;
They set the toad-stools in a row
For fays and their relations.

The bluebells rang at twelve o'clock
To call the guests together;
The birds came first—a merry flock—
The moon arranged the weather.

The flowers came disguised as elves,
Alluring, gay, and spritely.
"I hope you will enjoy yourselves,"
Their hostess said politely.

A frog appeared, arrayed in green;
He brought the toad, his cousin;
A lizard crawled upon the scene,
And beetles by the dozen.

A cock and hens were there, although
Their presence was surprising;
They do not care for balls, you know,
But dote on early rising.

The poodle-dog made quite a stir,
Then came two cats with kittens;
The mothers wore their best brushed fur,
The kits of course wore mittens.

Two rabbits and a long-eared hare
Came bounding to the party;
Chipmunks and squirrels too were there,
With manners free and hearty.

The fish came last, a wriggling crowd,
To dance a merry measure,
But one old flounder, stiff and proud,
Remarked, with great displeasure:

"We Flounders draw a strict fish-line.
I feel my honor slighted!
If asked I shall at once decline
To meet these cats benighted."

"Now I am very fond of fish,"
Said one Maltese, discreetly;
"And Flounder is my favorite dish,"
Added her sister, sweetly.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" cried Fairy Queen,
"My dance must not prove tragic";
And so she touched her guests unseen
With Fairies' Patent Magic.

Then all were friends or seemed to be
Until the ball was over.
Miss Wild Rose danced with Chickadee,
And Robin with Hop Clover.

Old Lobster reeled with Mullen-stock,
A. Beetle with Miss Pansy;
The Cod Fish chose the Hollyhock,
The Pike a sprig of Tansy.

They say the belle was Bouncing Bess,
Who jigged with young Wood Pecker;
She danced all night, I must confess,
And no one there could check her.

The beau was plainly A. Blue Jay,
Good dancer, and a dandy;
He fell in love with Fairy Fay,
And fed her sugar candy.

The band was led by Tiny Elf,
Sand Piper helped him gladly;
The fiddler Crab outdid himself,
And Trumpet-flower played madly.

The Tree-toads sang with all their might,
And from the bosky thickets
The wee, weird insects of the night
Chirped with the crooning Crickets.

They drank fresh dew in rose-leaf cups,
And ate bread-crumbs and honey;
The wise old Owl took dainty sups,
And he looked very funny.

It was indeed a brilliant ball,
And everybody thought so.
The elfin hosts were kind to all,
For fairies have been taught so.

With the first golden streak of dawn
A watchful gnome, the sentry,
Gave one expressive, warning yawn;
Then fairies vanished gently.

So gently that the morning sun,
  Who rose in all his glory,
Saw not a trace of any one,
  And never heard my story.

A DOGGEREL

(*Written to the authoress of "The Cat"*)

It seems to me, dear lady, that
You somewhat over-rate the cat,
A playful pet, I must admit,
But can one love her? Not a bit!

The very name suggests, you see,
A being full of perfidy.
Just call your dearest foe "a cat!"
And find out what she thinks of that!

We read sometimes of cataplasms,
Of cataleptic fits or spasms,
Of catacombs, dark, creepy places,
And catamounts who scratch men's faces.

Who likes to learn the catechism?
A dreadful flood's a cataclysm.
When dire disaster threatens, we
All speak of dread catastrophe.

These few examples surely teach
That those who formed the English speech
Began their meanest words with "cat."
Profound significance in that!

A dog was changed into a star,
Old Sirius, who shines afar;
But change a cat and you will see
A caterpillar—probably.

Each dog, we know, must have his day,
But in the night the cat holds sway.
She wails and sings in every key
And renders life long misery.

What boots to throw your shoes at her?
The horrid creature will not stir!
She simply glares with scornful eyes
Whose hateful glitter I despise.

An egotist, of course! No touch
Of sentiment for her! No such
Delightful, subtle flattery
As any cur gives courteously!

I love my dog, my dog loves me,
And that makes reciprocity!
One good plain dog to me is worth
Far more than all the cats on earth.

"SHE HID HER DREAMS"

She hid her dreams within a shell
That sailed far out to sea,
But one glad dream she loved full well
Returned persistently.

She gave her dream most tender care
And wore it next her heart;
With Cupid's cord she bound it there
And pinned it with his dart.

She begged of it awhile to stay
To share her hopes and fears.
Alack! One doleful, dismal day
The dream dissolved in tears.

'Twas no more faithful than the rest;
With them it vanished too.
And yet—and yet—she loved the best
This dream that proved untrue.

"MAKE-BELIEVE"

(*Rondel*)

I NEVER find, like Peter Pan,
That sylvan land of make-believe,
Far from the worries known to man,
From thorns that prick, from wounds that grieve.

Although I dwell where fairies weave
Their spells, and beg to join their clan,
I never find, like Peter Pan,
That sylvan land of make-believe.

Alas! no grown-up person can
Find out what children all perceive
Without an effort, scheme, or plan!
Although I search from dawn till eve,
I never find, like Peter Pan,
That sylvan land of make-believe!

"POLLY"

(*Rondel*)

What could I do but fall in love
With Polly when she passed to-day?
Could any man that you know of
Resist her if she glanced his way?

As well resist a bud of May
That flutters from the branch above!
What could I do but fall in love
With Polly when she passed to-day?

I followed meekly as a dove,
Resolved to own her sovereign sway,
And as I bent to kiss her glove
I vowed to be her knight alway!
What could I do but fall in love
With Polly when she passed to-day?

"WHILE SEMBRICH SINGS"

(*Rondeau*)

While Sembrich sings how soon we see
The crowd lean forward eagerly,
As loth to lose one dazzling note
That flashes from her wondrous throat—
A meteor of melody!

Sometimes with pathos, oft with glee,
She acts her part. It seems to be
All done for love, not played by rote,
While Sembrich sings.

Mistress of art, we quite agree!
She sets the jaded fancy free.
A thousand happy spirits float
On waves of sound to realms remote,
And life becomes a tranquil sea
While Sembrich sings!

"IN LILAC TIME"

(*Rondeau*)

In lilac time I hear the cry
Of passing vendors, shrill and high,
And suddenly the city street
Is filled with fragrance subtly sweet,
And evanescent as my sigh.

Would that I might just once defy
A cruel fate! I wonder why
I'm doomed to pine in noise and heat
In lilac time?

At least untrammeled thought may fly
To that old home of years gone by
Where there was one who used to meet
Me at the gate, and sometimes greet
Me with a kiss, when I drew nigh
In lilac time.

"SHE DROPPED THE ROSE"

(*Rondeau*)

She dropped the rose she wore to-night,
The pale pink rose, half hid from sight
Beneath a film of creamy lace,
That added just a touch of grace
To her soft gown of purest white.

She waltzed, of course, with keen delight.
I do not dance, but felt no spite,
For, as she swiftly passed my place,
She dropped the rose.

She flirted with a score—yes, quite!
She flitted by me like a sprite,
Without a tremor, not a trace
Of recognition in her face;
Yet I can swear I saw aright,
She dropped the rose!

"WHEN ETHEL COMES"

(*Rondeau*)

When Ethel comes, the sound her feet
Make on the stair is soft and sweet;
Her brown hair curls distractingly,
Her lovely face is fair to see,
Her presence makes my joy complete!

And yet I'm silent when we meet.
How strange it is that hearts will beat,
And men will tremble at the knee,
When Ethel comes!

She looks demure and most discreet.
"Good evening. Pray take a seat."
Are these few words to frighten me,
A college athlete, six feet three?
I will speak now—or else retreat
When Ethel comes!

BY WIRELESS

Grey gulls that can fly,
Swift clouds in the sky,
  Tireless waves of a midsummer sea;
Soft breeze from the west,
Oh, heed my request!
  Will you carry a message from me?

You fortunate Moon
To see him so soon
  On his long journey home from Bombay!
Faint shimmering star,
You shine from so far,
  Do you think you can show him the way?

Thoughts travel, they say;
I send mine to-day,
  For a ship must be easy to find!
Speed on! Let him know
The words sweet and low
  As I scatter them now to the wind!

I think of him yet,
I never forget,
For my love is as deep as the sea;
As strong and as sure—
'Twill ever endure.
Who will carry the message for me?

NOW AND HERE

(Ballade)

The grumbler and the pessimist
  Lament an age degenerate:
The times are evil, they persist
  In telling us, and preach and prate
  Of discontent, and racial hate.
Alack! Despite their words severe,
  They deem themselves most fortunate
To live their lives just now and here.

The gentle poets will insist
  In praising days when men were great
As gods, and women—seen through mellow
      mist—
  Were wondrous fair; they celebrate
  Romance and chivalry, relate
Brave deeds. old ruins they revere,
  Yet much prefer—I frankly state—
To live their lives just now and here.

The critics, with their artful twist
  Of words, attack our faults, await
The hour to flay—perhaps bridge-whist,
  Or motor-cars precipitate,
  Or modern greed—they deprecate
All these and more. They too (how queer!)
  Have meekly compromised with fate
To live their lives just now and here.

ENVOY

Queen of my heart, with mien sedate,
  And eyes of blue, so kind, so dear,
I love but you, nor hesitate
  To live my life just now and here!

JULY

A FIELD of golden rye,
Red poppies growing high,
Corn-flowers so blue they vie
In color with the sky;
Two jet-black crows that fly,
Glad reapers passing by,
A saucy girl's bright eye,
A droning cricket's cry,
A drowsy zephyr's sigh—
All these are reasons why
I love thee, fair July!

MY LADY

(Song)

'Tis bleak December in my heart
When she is far away,
But when my lady comes again
She brings the gladsome May.
'Tis blackest night within my heart
When she is far away,
But when my lady comes again
How bright and fair the day!
The dull hours drag through dreary days
When she is far away,
But when my lady comes again,
Swift time will never stay.
When she is gone
I am forlorn;
Birds will not sing,
Bells do not ring,
Hushed is my song;
Life is all wrong
When she is gone!

Life's roses wound with unseen thorns
When she is far from me,
But when my lady comes again,
Darts lose their poignancy!
My bells all jangle out of tune
When she is far from me,
But when my lady comes again,
How sweetly they agree!
My longing seems an idle dream
When she is far from me,
But when my lady comes again,
Love is reality!

When she is near,
Then Spring is here!
Then work is play,
Then hearts are gay,
Nought can annoy,
All is pure joy
When she is near!

THE VIOLINIST

He stood a moment watching the vast throng,
Impatient for the wild uproar to cease,
The loud applause that always greeted him,
The idol of the hour, its last caprice;
And as he gazed he thought, with humor grim:
"I search for hearts to win them with a song."

Gently as zephyrs stir a field of wheat
He moved his listeners, for he was wise;
He would not startle them; yet as he played
Their tensioned nerves relaxed, and faded eyes
Looked young again, and grey heads swayed
In rhythmic time to measure soft and sweet.

Now swift notes fall like rain and trickle through
His pliant fingers in delicious showers,
Bewildering, entrancing, ravishing!
The spirit of the summer stirs, and flowers
Exhale their redolence, and wood birds sing;
The glory of the earth is born anew!

The melody mounts like a flame; it seems
That fire and tone and color interblend,
Unite to weave a spell; and yet not all
Perceive the charm, not all can comprehend,
For each must vibrate to his heart's own call,
And each must hear the echo of his dreams.

He plays to one poor lonely country lad,
Friend-hungry in the city's careless crowd,
And in his thoughts the youth is home once more,
He sees the old folks standing, pleased and proud,
To welcome him, the neighbors at the door,
And hears the shouts of children gay and glad.

A woman hears the sobbing strings, with soul
Rebellious, restless, eager to be free
From hated heritage of world-wide woe;
To her the music is a potent plea
To rise above despair; the adagio
Means sacrifice of self, One for the whole.

Another listens to the waves of sound
That break on reefs of unrequited toil.
O splendid chords of triumph! Truth shall win!
Above the conflict and the mad turmoil
He hears the message of the violin:
Fight on, nor fear! A way shall yet be found!

How marvelous a great musician's power,
That lesser men indeed know nothing of!
The master touches grief—oh, wonderful!—
And by some subtle alchemy of love
Transmutes it into joy ineffable.
He grants men happiness for one brief hour!

Too soon, alas! the precious time is spent!
Reluctantly we turn to earth again,
The violin is mute, we go our way;
Yet lingering memories shall still remain,
Recurring cadences that some dull day
Will flood the room with sunshine and content.

YONDERLAND

(Scotch Mother and Child)

"SHALL we ever reach the shore of yonderland?
  Whiles it seems so far away,
And I catch no glimmer of the golden strand
  Where the night is changed to day."

"Child of mine, your soul shall reach the yonderland,
  Though your body turns to dust;
There are mony things we canna understand;
  We maun hope, dear lad, and trust."

"Shall I find you, mither, in the yonderland?
  Shall I see your loving face?
I'll be searching for you 'mid that angel band;
  I'll be looking through the place."

"We shall be togither in the yonderland,
  Hae nae fear, my son, nae fear;
I shall see the bairn I love, and touch his hand,
  Just the same in heaven as here."

"Are the puir folk welcome to the yonderland,
Lowly ones, like you and me?
You hae told me that the House is uncoo grand;
Who will pay the entrance fee?"

"There's rejoicing in the happy yonderland
When one sinner turns toward hame;
For the King Himself has given the command,
All go in who plead His Name."

UPLIFT HILL

When the golden sun is sinking in the west,
Then I love best
From the occupations of a busy day
To steal away,
And to seek a rocky ledge upon the hill,
Just to be still;
Just to listen in the silence for God's voice,
And to rejoice
In the beauty of the earth and sky and sea
Surrounding me.

Well I love my Angelus, brief hour of prayer,
When free from care
For a space my soul takes leave of earth-born things
And mounts on wings.
Indefinable, vague longings stir my breast
With sweet unrest,
And the upward path toward heaven shines so clear
While I am here
That I would, like Peter, build a tent and stay
Far from the fray.

On the heights it seems so easy to be good
And understood,
But how difficult, alas! to pray and praise
Through common days!
Let me gain an inspiration on the hill
To do God's will
On the level plain, amid the stir and strife
Of human life;
Let me try with cheerful courage in my heart
To do my part
In the lowlands, where the conflict must be fought
In deed and thought.

DEATHLESSNESS

Our discontent with this world's empty show
  Is but the instinct of immortal life.
We grow so weary here because we know
  A realm of rest beyond the toil and strife.

Each victory leaves something unattained;
  Defeated in the fight we still aspire;
Each problem solved brings thousands unexplained;
  Through mysteries we learn to climb up higher.

Ofttimes we follow messengers of pain,
  Ofttimes the drooping forms of bitter woe,
As surely as we fall we rise again,
  Forever upward still impelled to go.

Insatiable hunger gnaws the soul
  In search of food God only can supply.
We grope like blind men seeking for a goal;
  One happy day we shall find wings and fly.

Oh then imprisoned serfs of time and flesh
Shall breathe a heavenly ether long denied,
In garments of the King all clothed afresh,
Alive, awake, alert, and satisfied!

OPPORTUNITY

"What chance have I to win renown or place?
My best endeavors come to naught," he said,
And wearily he bowed his tired head,
A beaten runner, distanced in life's race;
Nor lifted he his sad, discouraged face
In time to see the maid who quickly sped
Across his path with lithe and noiseless tread,
And beckoned ere she vanished into space.
Such visions bright are neither strange nor rare
To those who watch and wait expectantly;
They lurk in dusky woods, they float in air,
They rise from depths of earth, they swim the sea;
But men must hope, not yield to grim despair,
If they would capture opportunity.

ARCADIA

We wandered forth together once in Spring,
When earth was young and all her children free;
Before the days of toil for you and me,
Before the days of priest, or book, or ring.
We swore no fealty then to any king,
But worshipped Pan, the god in Arcady,
Yet craved no boon of him save unity.
'Twas joy enough to live, to laugh, to sing,
To watch the flying birds, to pluck bright flowers,
To dance when shepherds piped, from sheer delight,
To follow fast where pleasure led the way
Through shining labyrinths of golden hours;
We knew no wisdom fraught with pain or fright
When life was still a lovers' holiday.

JOY

To-day I watched a graceful little boy
  Who eagerly pursued a butterfly,
  And stretched forth futile, baby hands to try
To catch this lightest breath of transient joy;
Yet ere he turned to seek some new employ
  The bright-winged creature swiftly sailed on high,
  And he was left to vaguely wonder why
He could not keep so beautiful a toy.
O sweet, elusive, fascinating joy!
  How oft I think of that brief, blissful day
When I had clasped you to my heart—almost.
Vain was my confidence, my hope, my boast!
  You spread your wings and gaily sped away,
And left me gazing skyward like the boy!

FIREWEED

Ofttimes a fierce, destructive forest fire
Will smite the helpless verdure in its track,
And passing leave a mound all charred and black,
A dreary, barren waste which none desire;
And then the zealous flowers in bright attire
Will come with gladness to supply the lack
Of beauty, and succeed in wooing back
The bees and birds to comfort this sad pyre.
So with my heart, when sorrow like a flame
Attacked it unawares and madly fought
To stifle happiness; for then there came
Sweet buds of solace and of love, which brought
Me gentle sympathy in God's own name,
And led back peace, whom I in vain had sought.

SPRING

When first I felt thy kindly hands touch mine
My heart beat fast, nor dared I look at thee
Lest thou shouldst guess, or even chance to see,
The quick blood coursing through my veins like wine.
How shall I sing this ecstasy divine?
I felt a captive thing, no longer free,
And yet I did not long for liberty.
I listened to my soul that talked with thine.
Perplexed and angry with myself, I strove
To read the riddle, vainly questioning,
"Why do the song-birds call me from above?
What are the apple-blossoms whispering?"
Then one pink petal answered, "This is love,
And love is but a sweeter name for Spring."

WINTER

The earth is covered with a snowy shroud,
For all the Summer flowers are buried deep
As youth's departed joy, and wild winds weep
For them: the trees and bushes once so proud
Are humbled now; their heads are meekly bowed;
The frozen streams are lulled to dreamless sleep;
Only the stars a dreary vigil keep
While the cold moon is huddled 'neath a cloud.

A woman waits and watches hour on hour
With face pressed close against the window-pane;
Her grief is dumb; her sad eyes burn and smart
With unshed tears. Poor frost-touched flower!
Her Summer-time is gone, nor comes again,
And Winter, cruel Winter, grips her heart.

LINES SUGGESTED BY A PORTRAIT OF MISS SARAH PORTER

Beloved teacher, good and true and wise!
What is the secret of unerring art
With which you reached and touched each pupil's heart?
What is the purpose in those earnest eyes?
In vain we search and strive to analyze
Such power. May that calm spirit now impart
Serenity to us, whose tears must start
Remembering your joy in sacrifice
For all your daughters, scattered east and west.
We follow where our recollection leads,
To walk again your ways of gentleness,
And think your thoughts of peace. May we attest
The virtue of your touch by noble deeds.
So shall we prove the friendship we profess!

THOMAS BAILEY ALDRICH

"Enamored Architect of Airy Rhyme"

He laid foundations for a house of dreams
When but a lad who wandered up and down
The quiet, shady streets of Portsmouth town;
The lyric structure grew with years; strong beams
Of pure desire sustained the walls; it seems
He never thought of glory or renown,
But toiled for art, and so he won his crown,
The poet's guerdon, bright with golden gleams.

His touch was whimsical, and all his own.
He loved an oriel or turret to enhance
The building's charm. His work was delicate,
Like that old stairway seen at Blois in France,
A masterpiece that none can imitate—
It looks like cobweb, yet is firm as stone.

CELIA THAXTER

She was indeed a nature-worshiper!
Think of this woman kneeling on the beach
Before the dawn, to learn what God would teach
Her spirit in the sunrise! Think of her
Beneath the stars, this lonely islander,
With face aglow, and heart too full for speech!
Think of her garden by the sea, where each
Bright bloom was hailed as Heaven's messenger!

O winds and waves that grieve at Appledore,
She needs no dreary dirge or solemn knell!
Her white-sailed bark has touched a distant shore,
That happy isle where poets love to dwell,
And she has song and friendship evermore.
Blow softly, sighing winds, for all is well!

MADISON J. CAWEIN

He has been likened to our hermit-thrush,
The modest bird of shy, retiring ways
Who in the lonely wood is wont to raise
His voice, gently at first, then with a rush
Of trills and ringing notes, a clear, glad gush
Of purest ecstasy; hid from man's gaze,
He calmly chants his vesper hymn of praise
That ends with darkness in a solemn hush.

No living poets? Take his book and read,
And spend an hour of unalloyed delight!
Illusion, legend, mystery and myth—
These are the charms this wizard conjures with,
Enchantment lures him like a moon-lit night
To follow where the gods of beauty lead.

DAWN

Majestic silence reigns! No sound shall mar
The regal entrance of our gracious queen,
Whose fresh robe glistens with a dazzling sheen,
And scintillates with dew. From near and far
Her sunbeam courtiers ride in haste. "Unbar
The gates!" they cry. "Let morning pass between!"
With stately step and calm, untroubled mien
The fair Aurora mounts her shining car:
Twelve restive hours await her first command;
She holds them lightly by an amber chain,
While with a spendthrift's free, unstinting hand
She flings her sparkling largess o'er the plain.
Rejoice, ye hills and vales, and fruitful land!
Hyperion's great daughter comes again!

NOON

The sun has paused an instant overhead
To watch with glowing eye the upturned face
Of pensive earth, who lies with careless grace
Pillowed on azure seas, and garlanded
With verdure; Languor and Repose have spread
A golden glamour round her resting place;
There Silence weaves a magic veil of lace,
And Reverie has scattered buds that shed
A faint oppressive perfume through the air;
The skies bend low to kiss her thoughtful brow;
Some hidden spell enthralls this child of light;
Rapt in a vision of the infinite,
She heeds no past, nor dreads a future care,
Her life the flawless Noon, the perfect Now.

TWILIGHT AT YORK HARBOR

The daylight loiters like a loving friend
Who lingers at the door to say good-bye;
The breeze has dwindled to a long-drawn sigh;
The flowers nod with drowsiness and bend
Their weary heads; dull insect voices blend
In slumber songs, and rise and fall and die;
One bright, audacious star dares climb the sky;
Fantastic coils of silver smoke ascend
From village roofs; the white, familiar spire
Points upward like a preacher's warning hand;
The stillness grows intense as throbbing pain;
Too soon the clouds have lost their lambent fire;
Night casts her mystic spell o'er sea and land;
Forget and dream—dream and forget again!

STARLIGHT

Who has not watched with wonder and delight
The coming of the stars, and marked them loom
One after one through gossamers of gloom
Dropped from the loosened grasp of nodding night?
A mass of tangled roses, gold and white,
The garden of the sky glows with their bloom;
So many and so fair, still God finds room
For millions more too faint for human sight!
Yet each one glorifies the rounded whole,
And all are needed in the perfect plan!
What is their destiny? What distant pole
Attracts this stately, silent caravan
That moves in solemn grandeur to the goal,
Hid through the ages from the mind of man?

NIGHT

THE leaden-weighted hours seem long as years
When one is watching, waiting for the day!
What problems vex the brain! What doubts dismay
The troubled soul! What troops of dismal fears
Assail the courage! Truth itself appears
Distorted, half a lie! Odd fancies play
With facts in rings of mist; old sorrows stray
From out the past, their faces drenched with tears;
Black deeds of violence, and grievous wrong,
And hateful crimes that dread the morning light
Stalk boldly forth—a loathsome, motley throng—
Filled with insensate rage and cruel spite
Against the good, who madly rush along
The thoroughfare that leads to endless night.

GRIEF

These wild chimeras of a burdened mind
Are doomed to vanish with the cock's first crow.
Why should we gaze persistently at woe,
That well of grief, in whose sad depths we find
Our own despair? Is this to be resigned
To sorrow? God has never willed it so!
He never meant his chosen ones to go
Through life with heads bowed low, ungrateful, blind
To countless blessings, blind to tasks that wait,
To needy ones that crouch before the gate,
To those that long for kindness—words of cheer
And comfort—words no man can speak until,
Softened by suffering, he bends to hear
A voice that bids him rise and do God's will.

TRUST

I JOURNEYED once in dreams through boundless space,
Without a compass, chart, or reckoning;
Alone, adrift, cut loose from every thing
That I had known on earth; in some vast place
Apart, companionless; I hid my face
And drew the darkness closer, murmuring,
I know not why, a verse we used to sing
Around our mother's knee. I seemed to trace
A form, to feel a presence in the night;
A great, sustaining strength upheld me where
I gazed beyond a moving cloud of fears;
And then at last—O miracle of sight!—
There rose the star of trust, effulgent, fair,
And beautiful as love that smiles through tears.

FAITH

The calm of nature tortures my sad heart;
The sweet serenity of cloudless skies
Mocks at my grief; the fierce sun terrifies;
The stars are powerless to heal the smart;
The caroling of birds hurts like a dart;
The scarred and furrowed fields epitomize
The universal pain; with tear-dimmed eyes
I seem to view myself, their counterpart.

Then Faith revives, and whispers in my ear,
And lo! I feel ashamed of unbelief—
The soul asserts itself; the heavens above
Are luminous with God; my way shines clear,
And I can trust again, and wear my grief
With courage, proudly, as a badge of love.

HOPE

Benignant friend of all the human race,
We bless thee for thy constant help and cheer!
God gave thee power to cast out baneful fear,
To ease our loads, to flood the darkest place
With mellow sunlight. Men will bravely face
The rudest shocks of life when thou art near;
The shadowed road to death becomes less drear
Since thou wilt travel with us into space.

While cowards shrink back trembling and afraid
To step across the threshold, thou dost begin
The journey eagerly, one undismayed
By doubt, or dread of unforgiven sin;
With confidence that Christ has fully paid
The price, and hope, glad hope, may enter in!

CHARITY

I SEE thee in a vision—tall and straight
And shapely as a lily; round thy head
The sacred nimbus glows and gleams, instead
Of jeweled diadem of earthly state.
Thy soul, unsullied, pure, immaculate,
Shines as the stars. Supernal light is shed
Upon thy way. Thy sapphire cloak outspread,
Protects a host too great to estimate,
Whose sins are hid by gentle charity.
Thou dost implant within the human breast
Affection strong, and true and heavenly.
Of all sweet tasks this is the loveliest!
Most tender sister of the wondrous three,
Thy very name means love made manifest!

FREEDOM

Sing me a song of gladness and content—
  Life freed from fears that manacle with chains;
  Freed from distrust, from hatred and the pains
Of envy, freed from wailings and lament,
From galling memories of hours misspent,
  Freed from the earthy taint of sordid gains—
  Yea, sing a sin-freed life that still retains
The fragrance of a garden innocent.

Sing me a song of freedom, clear and sweet,
The great enfranchisement, assured, complete,
  When the exultant spirit leaves the shoal
  Of doubt, and mounts from height to glittering height
  On wings of aspiration flecked with light.
    Yea, sing the manumission of a soul!

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